

As you think about
child care for your
3- to 5-year-old...



make a visit...
ask questions...
then decide.



New York State Office of Children and Family Services
Capital View Office Park
52 Washington Street
Rensselaer, New York 12144

Choosing good child care is an important decision. Safe and positive child care sets the stage for healthy growth and development. It takes time, patience and an understanding of what to look for when selecting child care.

Learn about different child care programs and visit them before making a decision. Call and make an appointment. Look around the child care setting carefully. Watch how the children and adults interact with one another. Ask questions. Listen. Talk to parents who use the caregiver.

Once you have selected a child care setting and your child is in care, keep asking questions. Always check to make sure the program still meets the needs of your family. It's a lot of work, but your child is worth it.

Selecting child care is an important step in the life of your child. You know the needs of your child and family. This important decision will make a big difference in your child's development, health and happiness.

Think About Child Care Resources

Call the New York Parents' Connection at **1-800-345-KIDS** or visit **www.ocfs.state.ny.us** for copies of:

- *As You Think About Child Care*
- *As You Think About Child Care for Your Infant or Toddler*
- *As You Think About Child Care for Your School-Age Child*



State of New York
Andrew M. Cuomo, Governor



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www.ocfs.state.ny.us

For a copy of the New York State child care regulations and/or more information on selecting child care contact your local child care resource agency, visit the NYS Office of Children and Family Services website at **www.ocfs.state.ny.us** or call the New York Parents' Connection at **1-800-345-KIDS**.

Call the Child Care Complaint Line at **1-800-732-5207** with concerns about a caregiver.

To report child abuse and neglect call **1-800-342-3720**.

Other brochures available through the New York State Office of Children and Family Services:

Kieran's Law (Pub. 4628) a brochure on the responsibilities and services available to you as an employer of an in-home caregiver.

This publication is available in Spanish.
Pub #1115C (Rev. 11/07)
Please call 1-800-345-KIDS.

Pursuant to the Americans with Disabilities Act, the New York State Office of Children and Family Services will make this material available in large print or on audiotape upon request.

Resources

A copy of the regulations is available at each regulated child care site, through the local Child Care Resource and Referral agency, the NYS Office of Children and Family Services website at www.ocfs.state.ny.us or NYS Parents' Connection at **1-800-345-KIDS**.

For more information on selecting child care contact your local Child Care Resource and Referral agency or contact the New York Parents' Connection at **1-800-345-KIDS** or visit www.ocfs.state.ny.us.

If you have concerns about a child care provider, call the Child Care Complaint Line at:
1-800-732-5207.

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Notes: _____

1. Visit the child care program while it is open and children are there.
2. Take the time to talk to the caregiver and ask questions. Look around the program to see how things are handled.
3. Make sure the child care program:
 - ☐ Has enough caregivers for the number of children. Check New York State regulations for child/caregiver ratios.
 - ☐ Takes steps to prevent accidents and has a plan to handle fire or medical emergencies.
 - ☐ Knows how to help children stay healthy and teaches them healthy eating habits.
 - ☐ Plans a balance of indoor and outdoor play that is active and quiet.
4. A good relationship between the children and caregiver is important. The caregiver should:
 - ☐ Enjoy talking to and playing with the children.
 - ☐ Have experience, education and/or training in caring for children.
5. Consider the cost, location and hours the child care is open.
6. Talk to other parents who use the caregiver and keep looking until you are satisfied with your choice.

Think About the Type of Child Care

Licensed or registered child care settings must meet specific health, safety and program requirements. Some caregivers may not be required to meet state regulations to legally provide care. These options should meet your own standards for the health, safety and development of your child.

Regulated Child Care Situations for All Ages

- ☐ **Day Care Center** - more than six children, not in someone's home, for more than three hours a day.
- ☐ **Small Day Care Center** - three to six children, not in someone's home, for more than three hours a day.
- ☐ **Family Day Care Home** - three to six children, in a home, for more than three hours a day. One or two more children may come after school, and there are no more than two infants being cared for in the program.
- ☐ **Group Family Day Care Home** - seven to 12 children in a home, with the help of an assistant, for more than three hours a day.
- ☐ **Head Start** - licensed as a day care center and provides additional services to children and families.
- ☐ **Pre-kindergarten Programs** - offered by many public schools for 4- to 5-year-old children during the school year.
- ☐ **School-age Child Care** - seven or more children (kindergarteners through 12-year-olds) during non-school hours.

Before Making the Decision

Paying for Child Care

You may be eligible for help to pay for child care. Contact your county department of social services to get more information about child care subsidies. To find your local department of social services, call the NYS Parents' Connection at **1-800-345-KIDS** or go to **www.ocfs.state.ny.us**.

New York State Child and Dependent Care Tax Credit

You may qualify to claim the New York State child and dependent care tax credit. For more information contact the New York State Department of Taxation and Finance General Tax Information at **1-800-225-5829** or go to the website at **www.tax.state.ny.us**.

Notes: _____

Before Making the Decision

Provider 2

Child Care Program: _____

Child Care Address: _____

Child Care Phone #: _____

Type of Child Care: _____

Number of Children: _____ Number of Caregivers: _____

Provider 3

Child Care Program: _____

Child Care Address: _____

Child Care Phone #: _____

Type of Child Care: _____

Number of Children: _____ Number of Caregivers: _____

Think About the Type of Child Care

Legal but Not Regulated Child Care Situations

- ☐ **Informal Care** - care provided by a child's relative, a family friend or neighbor who watches one or two children not related to the caregiver, but never more than a total of eight children.
- ☐ **In-home Care** - when a caregiver comes to your home to watch your children.
- ☐ **Non-public Nursery School and Pre-kindergarten Programs** - A program that is not in someone's home that cares for children three hours a day or less.

Completing the Checklist

Visit each program. Ask the caregiver questions and look around to see how things are handled. Ask about the things that are important to you and not on the checklist. Based on what you find, write Y/yes or N/no in the space provided. Once you've completed your visits, compare the different programs. Talk to other parents who use the caregiver. Then decide on the best program for your child and family.

Think About Family Needs

Before Making the Decision

Think About Family Needs

The cost of care, program hours and transportation are important things to consider when selecting child care. Make sure the policies and rules of the child care are available in writing.

Family Needs	Provider 1	Provider 2	Provider 3
You can get to the child care setting from home and work.			
The program is open the hours your child needs care.			
Ask the caregiver about payment policies including: ■ Child care subsidy payment ■ Payment options ■ Due dates and late fees ■ Vacation and holiday payment			
Parents may visit the child care program any time it is open.			
Parents get a copy of the policies and rules for the child care program.			
Parents are told about the activities for children at least once a week.			

Caregiver Information/Ratios

Use this space to write information about each caregiver visited. There should be enough caregivers for the number of children in a program. Child/caregiver ratios for regulated care are found in the state regulations. For care that is legal but not regulated, the guidelines are listed in this brochure.

Provider 1

Child Care Program: _____

Child Care Address: _____

Child Care Phone #: _____

Type of Child Care: _____

Number of Children: _____ Number of Caregivers: _____

Before Making the Decision

Before Making the Decision

Compare and consider the different caregivers you visited during your search. Ask other parents about the caregiver. Call the regional office of the New York State Office of Children and Family Services for the licensing history (including regulatory violations) of regulated programs. To contact your local regional office call **1-800-732-5207** or visit the website at **www.ocfs.state.ny.us**. Then decide where you feel comfortable leaving your child and if it is the best fit for your family.

Before Making the Decision	Provider 1	Provider 2	Provider 3
<p>The regional office of OCFS will let you know if the caregiver:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Is licensed or registered. ■ Was licensed or registered in the past. ■ Has registration/licensing or violation history. 			
Talk to other families who use the caregiver.			

Notes: _____

Think About the Caregiver

Think About the Caregiver

A good relationship between the child, family and caregiver is important to everyone. The caregiver should have experience, education and/or training in child care. The caregiver should enjoy talking to and playing with children and communicate well with parents.

Think About the Caregiver	Provider 1	Provider 2	Provider 3
The caregiver has experience caring for children and really enjoys working with them.			
The caregiver takes training and/or education courses to learn about the health, safety and development of children.			
The caregiver greets each child and parent when coming to and leaving the program.			
When a child is upset the caregiver meets the child's needs quickly even when the program is busy.			
The caregiver respects and understands the values and culture of the child's family.			

Think About the Caregiver

Think About the Caregiver	Provider 1	Provider 2	Provider 3
All regulated caregivers, substitutes and anyone over 18 years old living in a regulated child care home have been fingerprinted and completed all required criminal and child abuse background checks.			
Ask the informal caregiver if he/she has a criminal background and if anyone else over 18 years old will be in the home during child care hours.			

Notes: _____

Think About Positive Discipline

Think About Positive Discipline

Caregivers need to set limits for children. Those limits depend on a child's age and abilities. Children should be reminded of the limits without hitting or scaring them, hurting their feelings or taking away something important like food or rest. Corporal punishment is never allowed.

Positive Discipline	Provider 1	Provider 2	Provider 3
The caregiver has a written discipline policy that is given to each parent.			
Parents and the caregiver talk about and agree on appropriate discipline.			
<p>The caregiver understands that 3-to 5-year-olds need:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Gentle reminders to help them get along. ■ Help to talk about their feelings and use their words. ■ Reasonable limits. 			
There is enough space and a variety of interesting things to play with. The caregiver helps children find something else to do when frustrated with an activity.			

Think About Their Day

Active and Quiet Time	Provider 1	Provider 2	Provider 3
For outdoor water play the caregiver does not use wading and other pools where the water is regularly dumped for sanitary reasons.			
There are soft pieces of furniture and stuffed toys when children need quiet space and time.			
<p>The caregiver plans rest/naptime for the children each day:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Children are always seen and heard during naptime. ■ The space is quiet and large enough for naptime. ■ Children have their own mat, cot or bed with clean sheets and blankets. ■ Quiet activities are planned for children who wake up early or do not nap. 			

Notes: _____

Think About Safety

Think About Safety

It is important to know what steps the caregiver takes to prevent accidents and what plans are in place in case of emergency.

Preventing Accidents	Provider 1	Provider 2	Provider 3
Children are supervised by the caregiver and can be seen and heard at all times, even naptime.			
<p>The program is childproofed to prevent accidents. Protections include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Poisonous and dangerous materials, like medicines and cleaning solutions, are stored out of the reach of children. ■ Electrical sockets are covered. ■ There are child proof locks on cabinets. ■ Hanging cords from blinds are secured. ■ Small household objects that may be a choking hazard are out of reach. ■ There are safety gates on stairs. 			
The child care program has been checked for lead, radon and asbestos.			

Think About Safety

Preventing Accidents	Provider 1	Provider 2	Provider 3
There is fencing or another sturdy barrier to keep children away from pools, ponds, and other bodies of water.			
The caregiver regularly checks the outdoor and indoor equipment for wear and tear.			

Handling Emergencies	Provider 1	Provider 2	Provider 3
The caregiver has a plan to handle fire or medical emergencies.			
The caregiver knows how to handle minor injuries and what to do when an injury requires a trip to the doctor or emergency room.			
There is a working phone. Fire, police, ambulance and poison control telephone numbers are posted.			
The caregiver has a stocked first-aid kit.			

Think About Their Day

Learning, Thinking and Imagination	Provider 1	Provider 2	Provider 3
<p>There is a variety of and enough materials and toys that are clean, safe and in good repair for children to use on their own:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Indoor and outdoor pretend play materials like dress-up clothes, pots and pans, toy tools, water and sand. ■ Paper, crayons, paint, and clay. ■ Toys, puzzles and a radio/CD/tape player. 			

Active and Quiet Time	Provider 1	Provider 2	Provider 3
The outdoor and indoor play spaces and equipment are clean, safe and free of sharp edges.			
The caregiver takes the children outdoors every day unless the weather is bad.			
Indoor space is large enough for active children to use balls, rugs and pads for tumbling and push/ride toys.			

Think About Their Day

Think About Their Day

A child care setting that offers a variety of activities and experiences will help children develop skills for school readiness. Look for a balance of active, quiet, indoor and outdoor play based on the abilities and interests of children.

Talking and Language	Provider 1	Provider 2	Provider 3
<p>To help children use words the caregiver:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Reads stories, sings songs and names objects with the children. ■ Encourages the children to talk and ask questions. ■ Offers books, games and other materials such as magazines and tapes/CDs for the children to use on their own. 			

Watching Television	Provider 1	Provider 2	Provider 3
Television and videos are only used for short periods of time and for educational purposes.			
There are other activities for children who do not want to watch television or videos.			

Think About Safety

Fire Emergencies	Provider 1	Provider 2	Provider 3
There are smoke detectors on each floor and multipurpose fire extinguishers in the child care home. The day care center has a fire detection system.			
There are at least two separate building exits in case of fire.			
The plan to escape a fire emergency is practiced at least once a month with the children, even during naptime.			

Notes: _____

Think About Keeping Children Healthy

Think About Keeping Children Healthy

To keep children healthy, the caregiver should encourage good health habits and take steps to prevent the spread of germs. Make sure you know the program has an approved health care plan and ask to see a copy. Child care programs must follow specific rules to give over-the-counter and prescription medicine to children.

Keeping Children Healthy	Provider 1	Provider 2	Provider 3
All children must have up-to-date immunizations.			
The caregiver prevents the spread of germs by washing hands many times during the day. Children also wash their hands often during the day.			
The child care setting is clean. Toys, furniture and floors are washed frequently with a bleach solution to prevent the spread of germs.			

When Children Are Sick or Injured	Provider 1	Provider 2	Provider 3
The caregiver's health care plan meets the health care needs of my child.			
The caregiver has a plan to handle medical emergencies.			

Think About Keeping Children Healthy

When Children Are Sick or Injured	Provider 1	Provider 2	Provider 3
The health care plan includes whether the caregiver will give medicine to children.			
The caregiver has the skills and training to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Give over-the-counter or prescription medicine to children. ■ Know a minor injury from one that needs medical attention. ■ Give first aid and CPR. 			

Eating Healthy	Provider 1	Provider 2	Provider 3
Meals and snacks include a variety of fresh fruits, vegetables, meats, bread and milk products.			
Menus for meals and snacks are posted or given to parents ahead of time.			
Younger children are fed smaller portions. Foods that may cause choking like popcorn, carrots, peanuts or raisins are not served.			
Meal time is for learning skills like self-feeding finger foods, using a spoon or fork or setting the table.			